

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A Readings & Background



This Sunday's Readings

First Reading *Exodus 17:3-7*

God tells Moses to bring forth water from the rock.

Responsorial Psalm : *Psalm 95:1-2,6-9*

Sing joyfully in the presence of the Lord.

Second Reading *Romans 5:1-2,5-8*

Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Gospel Reading *John 4:5-42*

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.

(shorter form: John 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42)

Background on the Gospel Reading

On this Sunday and the next two Sundays, ***we break from reading the Gospel of Matthew to read from John's Gospel.*** The Gospel of *John is the only Gospel not assigned to a particular liturgical year.* Instead, readings from John's Gospel are interspersed throughout our three-year liturgical cycle.

In today's Gospel, the **dialogue between Jesus and a woman from Samaria** is among the most lengthy and most theological found in Scripture. The most startling aspect of the conversation is that it happens at all. Jesus, an **observant Jew of that time, was expected to avoid conversation with women in public.** The animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans should have prevented the conversation as well. The woman herself alludes to the break from tradition: **"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"** Yet Jesus not only converses with the woman, he also asks to share her drinking vessel, an action that makes him unclean according to Jewish law.

The initial conversation between Jesus and the woman is better **understood if we consider the importance of water, especially in the climate of Israel.** At first, the woman understands Jesus' promise of "living water" in a literal sense: **"Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."** With no running water, the daily trip to the well by the women of the community was of paramount importance. The women of the town would have traveled to the well in the early morning, **but this woman came to the well at noon, the hottest time of the day.** The timing of her visit is a clear sign that **she is an outcast within the Samaritan community.** We learn in her conversation with Jesus that she is an outcast because of her **"many husbands."**

Behind the conversation lies the animosity and rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans. *Samaritans shared Jewish ancestry, but Samaritans had intermarried with foreigners when they lived under the rule of the Assyrians. Samaritan religion included worship of Yahweh, but was also influenced by the worship of other gods.* When the Jews refused Samaritan help in the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, the Samaritans eventually built a temple for themselves at Mt. Gerizim (the same mountain mentioned by the woman at the well). Like the Jews, the Samaritans believed that a Messiah would come.

The high point of the conversation is when Jesus reveals himself to her as the Messiah. His answer to the Samaritan woman's questions about worship is meant to **predict a time when worshiping in truth and spirit will become the way to worship.**

After the conversation, the **Samaritan woman becomes a disciple.** Even though she is an outcast and not a Jew, **she returns to her town to lead others to Jesus and to wonder whether she has found the Messiah.** The Samaritan townspeople return with her to meet Jesus for themselves, and many are said to come to believe in him. The significance of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman has many levels. **The first is personal:** The woman is **herself converted to belief in Jesus as Messiah** because **he knows her sin but speaks with her just the same.** **The second is social: Having come to know Jesus as the Messiah, the Samaritan woman becomes an evangelist to her own people.** **The third level of the story is educational:** Jesus uses his encounter with the Samaritan woman **to teach his disciples that God's mercy is without limit.** The disciples return from their shopping quite confused to find Jesus talking with a Samaritan, and a woman at that! But the conversion of the Samaritan townspeople is a foretaste of the kind of **open community that will be created among those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah.**

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

Making the Connection (Grades 1, 2, and 3)

Gospel Reading

John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.
(shorter form: John 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42)

Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water from a well. The woman is surprised because Jews and Samaritans didn't speak to each other. Jesus uses this opportunity to tell the woman about the water that brings eternal life and to tell her that he is the Savior sent by God. Many Samaritans come to believe when they hear the story and see Jesus.

Materials Needed

- Salted pretzels and a small cup for each child
- Eye dropper

Note: *Be aware of food allergies and make arrangements for those with special eating needs.*

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Bring a small cup for each child, an eyedropper, and salted pretzels. Give each child some pretzels to eat. After a few minutes, ask whether anyone is thirsty. Give the children a few drops of water using the eyedropper. Ask whether that was enough to drink.
2. Then say: ***If I gave you all the water you'd like to drink today, do you think you could go until next week without drinking anything?
Water is so important that without it, people become sick in a very short time.***
3. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, Jesus used the need for water to explain that he offers us life in heaven with him that will not depend on water. When we have faith in Jesus, we have eternal life. Let us listen carefully to that Gospel reading.***
4. Read aloud the short form of today's Gospel, John 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42.
5. Say: ***We heard Jesus and the Samaritan woman talk a lot about water. When do we use water in church? (We bless ourselves with water when we enter church. We are baptized with water.)***
6. Say: ***Lent is a time when we remember what Baptism means. We also try harder to live as followers of Jesus. When we were baptized, we were like the woman at the well: We came to know Jesus as our Savior, and we were sent to bring the good news of Jesus to others.***
7. Conclude by praying together today's psalm, Psalm 95, or the Lord's Prayer.

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

Making the Connection (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

Gospel Reading

John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.
(shorter form: John 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42)

In Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, we learn about the fullness of God's mercy. The woman is a Samaritan, and Samaritans were people with whom observant Jews had no contact. She is also an outcast in Samaritan society. Yet Jesus reaches out to this woman and brings her to knowledge of salvation.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask: ***What kind of people are shunned or avoided in society today? If Jesus were alive today, what kind of people would we least expect him to talk with? Accept all reasonable answers.***
2. Say: ***Today's Gospel tells us about a conversation that Jesus had with a woman from Samaria. Their conversation surprised people of Jesus' time because Jewish men weren't supposed to talk to women who were strangers. We are also told that the woman is a sinner. She is a Samaritan as well, and Jews avoided Samaritans. Let's listen carefully as we read today's Gospel about Jesus' meeting with this Samaritan woman at the well.***
3. Invite volunteers to read different parts of today's Gospel, John 4:5-42.
4. Ask: ***How did the disciples respond when they found Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman? (They were amazed and confused.)***
5. Say: ***Jesus tells his disciples that they will reap the fruits of the labor of others. Reaping fruits means "collecting or receiving something good." When Jesus says that, he is telling the disciples that they may find faith in unexpected places. The disciples see an example of this when the entire Samaritan town comes to believe that Jesus is the saviour.***
6. Conclude by praying together that the members of your group will be open and attentive to God's work, even in unexpected places. Pray together the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.



Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A Making the Connection (Grades 7 and 8)

Gospel Reading John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.
(shorter form: John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42)

Young people in our society, like most people, can easily take water for granted. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus uses the image of water, a resource necessary for survival, to describe himself

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Arrange the young people in groups of three or four. Have them brainstorm a list of all the ways that we use water in an average day as well as all the places water is available in their everyday lives.
2. Allow sufficient time for the young people to complete their work and then have them report to the entire group as you record their ideas on the board.
3. Point out how dependent we are on water and how abundant water is in our society.
4. Remind the young people that in many places around the world, people do not have access to affordable, clean water.
5. ***In the climate of Israel, water is a very valuable resource, not readily available to everyone. In this Sunday's Gospel, we find Jesus using the image of water, a resource necessary for survival, to describe himself.***
6. Invite volunteers to read different parts of this Sunday's Gospel, John 4:5-42.
7. ***Jesus and the Samaritan woman had a lengthy discussion about water. When do we use water in the Church?***
(We bless ourselves with water when we enter a church. We are baptized with water.)
8. ***Lent is a time when we remember what Baptism means. We also try harder to live as followers of Jesus. When we were baptized, we were like the woman at the well: we came to know Jesus, the Living Water, and we were sent to invite others to drink from this well that never runs dry.***
9. Conclude by praying together today's psalm, Psalm 95, or the Lord's Prayer.

Psalm 95

A Call to Worship and Obedience

¹ O come, let us sing to the LORD;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³ For the LORD is a great God,

and a great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;

the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,

and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down,

let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

⁷ For he is our God,

and we are the people of his pasture,

and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!

⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,

as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ when your ancestors tested me,

and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation

and said, "They are a people whose hearts go

astray,

and they do not regard my ways."

¹¹ Therefore in my anger I swore,

"They shall not enter my rest."

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A Family Connection

Gospel Reading John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.
(shorter form: John 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42)

Lent is a season for repentance. It is a season during which we are called to reflect upon and to live deeply the promises of Baptism.

The well and the conversation ***about water immediately recall for us the Sacrament of Baptism.***

As the Samaritan woman was converted and sent ***on a mission because of the conversation about water, we too are converted and sent by our Baptism to preach the good news of Jesus to others.***

Take this opportunity to reflect upon the ***importance of Baptism with your family.***

If you have photos or other mementos of your family's Baptisms, bring them out and take some time to recall the day of Baptism and its importance to you and your family.

Create a prayer table that includes these mementos and a bowl of holy water. After you have spent some time talking about Baptism, invite everyone to listen carefully and prayerfully to today's Gospel.

Read John 4:5-42 together.

Ask how Jesus' meeting with the woman at the well is like Baptism. (***Jesus knows the woman's sin and forgives her. The woman comes to know Jesus as the Messiah. The woman invites others to meet Jesus.***)

Pray a prayer of blessing for each member of the family that God will help each one live the promises of his or her Baptism.

Pray together the Lord's Prayer.